



Center for
Innovation and
Engagement

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT ACCEPT INTERVENTION TO WORK WITH ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH HIV

Adolescents and young adults (AYA) with HIV make up approximately 20 percent of new HIV cases. AYA with HIV experience unique stressors and experiences as they adjust to an HIV diagnosis during a critical time for physical, emotional, mental, and cognitive growth. During this time, there is an increased understanding and importance of one's identity, sexuality, friendships, and romantic attraction, all of which intersect with adjusting to living with HIV.

Relevant Statistics

The following statistics pertain to people with HIV in the United States:

- In 2019 7,648 AYA were diagnosed with HIV.¹
- AYA mostly acquire HIV through sexual activity.¹
- AYA with HIV are predominantly Black and Latinx men who have sex with men. Cisgender and transgender AYA women of color are also disproportionately impacted.¹
- AYA with HIV often deal with multiple disclosures, including HIV status, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation.²



Stock photo. Posed by models



Providing AYA-Friendly Services

Ensuring high-quality care for AYA and LGBTQ+ youth is an essential component towards providing more patient-centered care and ensuring that services are tailored to best meet the needs of AYA with HIV. To make sure youth receive quality and AYA-friendly services and support the successful implementation of Project ACCEPT, it is essential that organizations ask themselves whether they have implemented the World Health Organization's systems-level principles that promote AYA-friendly services:³

- **Availability:** "Does your organization have health care and mental health providers who provide care that is sensitive to the needs of AYA, more specifically, LGBTQ+ AYA? Does your organization employ AYA peers with HIV?"
- **Accessibility:** "Does your organization offer services that are easily obtained, with expanded hours during weekends or evenings, child-care services, transportation, and meals to promote engagement?"
- **Acceptability:** "Does your organization prioritize confidentiality and inclusive services for AYA and for LGBTQ+ AYA?"
- **Equity:** "Does your organization ensure high-quality care for all youth regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, citizenship status, insurance status, or primary language, among other factors?"



Centering Health Equity in HIV Service Delivery

Centering health equity in HIV service delivery for AYA is much needed, given that they face multiple forms of stigma and discrimination. Below are youth-affirming strategies to implement Project ACCEPT using an equitable lens:

- Assess and address HIV stigma in the clinical setting. Recognize that HIV stigma persists regardless of medical advances.
- Minimize traumatic clinical experiences by not continually asking patients about their history. Ensure that service providers speak with each other instead of repeatedly asking patients about their HIV diagnosis or other private information. Train providers on how to spot and stop microaggressions that keep young people out of care.
- People with HIV and couples impacted by HIV have often been stigmatized for their desire to have children.⁴ Provide reproductive health services and support for AYA with HIV to access reproductive autonomy.
- Ensure a safe and inclusive environment and the availability of gender-affirming services for transgender and non-binary youth (e.g., assistance with name changes, updating gender markers on identity documents, insurance navigation, hormone replacement therapy, etc.).



Strategies to Build Organizational and Staff Capacity

There are evidence-informed ways to build capacity to promote AYA-friendly services:

- **Availability:** Not all youth-friendly services are LGBTQ+ friendly services and vice versa. It is important that staff are trained in adolescent and LGBTQ+ service delivery regularly. Topics of importance include:
 - Youth and Adolescent Development
 - Reproductive and Sexual Health
 - LGBTQ+ Health
- **Accessibility:** When providing services, ensure that the immediate needs of AYA are considered, including travel to the site, childcare services, and meals and beverages during the session.
 - Transportation support includes ride-share services, public transportation cards, or cash
 - Childcare services include onsite care or vouchers
 - Meals and beverages include onsite meals or meal vouchers
- **Acceptability:** Gather feedback from participants to ensure that the services are inclusive and adapt as needed.
- **Equity:** Review the demographic profile of participants to assure the program meets the needs of participants and is accessible. For example, ensure that services are free of charge, grouped by important markers (gender identity), and delivered in their primary language.

Stories from the Field

Young women with HIV often feel isolated. When a small group of women convened for Project ACCEPT, in addition to care outcomes, they connected socially and emotionally. There was a shared understanding that they were not alone. The ACCEPT team and participants met a few times after the intervention was completed to go on walks, connect, and continue their friendship. While the intervention ends, we hope that these types of friendships and bonds stay.

Sustaining Efforts

Project ACCEPT is adaptable to many settings. Some of the key aspects that are needed to ensure it is implemented sustainably include the following:

- Project ACCEPT is facilitated by a trained mental health provider and a peer facilitator. Many clinics already have these staff on-site as part of their HIV service delivery continuum. It is recommended that staff job descriptions are adjusted to ensure there is built-in support for this program.
- Project ACCEPT was intended to be delivered in person. Ensure there is confidentiality when allotting space for sessions. There may be flexibility in delivering sessions virtually, but this will require special considerations to ensure confidentiality and minimize virtual meeting fatigue.
- Establish community partnerships to identify other trained mental health providers or peer facilitators that can be trained to offer support with intervention delivery.

Tailoring Facilitation Content Project

ACCEPT encourages program facilitators to:

- Update statistics and other reproductive or sexual health information.
- Customize role-play scenarios to reflect the environment in which AYA participants exist. For example, if a young person lives in a rural area, role-plays may include identifying methods to access sexual and reproductive health services when public transportation is limited.
- Make activities more interactive, appealing to different learning styles.
- Tailor materials to ensure the words, images, and scenarios are inclusive of all participants to increase engagement and effectiveness.

Conclusion

Project ACCEPT is a unique intervention that supports adolescents and young adults with HIV to become more engaged in their healthcare and build support among each other. Special considerations are needed to ensure that this intervention remains available, acceptable, accessible, inclusive, and equitable for youth.



Providing Intersectional Services to AYA

AYA are at a critical period within their development and may need support to help them overcome the compounding challenges from ageism, racism, homophobia, and other structural barriers. Consider the following strategies to create supportive environments for AYA:

- Does the organization have the following in place?
 - All staff adopt the use of pronouns, preferred names
 - Mental health services available to support with new HIV diagnoses
 - Reproductive and sexual health services, including fertility support and safer sex services
 - Substance use services, including alcohol and other drugs
 - Wrap-around services, including case management to support other urgent needs (e.g., housing, employment, gender-affirming therapy, child-care support, etc.)
- Are AYA reflective of participants available to deliver the intervention?
 - For example, do you have enough young women (minimum 3–4) to deliver the intervention?
 - Is there someone that can relate to participants that will be a peer facilitator for this group?
 - Are family support services available to assist youth who wish to disclosure their sexual orientation and gender identity to their families?

Additional Resources

The Challenge Initiative: Adolescent & Youth Friendly Services Toolkit for Delivering Services for Youth

<https://tciurbanhealth.org/courses/adolescent-youth-sexual-reproductive-health-services-supply/lessons/adolescent-and-youth-friendly-services-3/>

Population Services International: Facilitator's Guide for Training Health Providers In Youth-Friendly Health Services
<https://www.psi.org/publication/facilitators-guide-training-health-providers-in-youth-friendly-health-services/>

University of Michigan Medical School: Starter Guide for LGBTQ+ Youth-Friendly Spaces
<https://umhs-adolescenthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/lgbtq-youth-friendly-services-starter-guide.pdf>

Human Rights Campaign: Supporting and Caring for Transgender Children
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/supporting-caring-for-transgender-children>

Center for Innovation and Engagement (CIE): Project ACCEPT Intervention Page
<https://ciehealth.org/intervention/project-accept/>

Center for Innovation and Engagement (CIE): Project ACCEPT Technical Assistance
<https://ciehealth.org/contact/>

References

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- ²Hosek, S., Brothers, J., Lemos, D. & the Adolescent Medicine Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions. (2008). An Ecological Model of Stressors Experienced by Youth Newly Diagnosed With HIV, *Journal of HIV/AIDS Prevention in Children & Youth*, 9:2, 192–218. Retrieved on September 9, 2021, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15538340902824118>
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